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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000810

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INTRODUCTORY MEETING WITH MINDEF  
OHANIAN

Classified By: Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) During the Ambassador's October 1 introductory meeting with Armenian Minister of Defense Seyran Ohanian, the Ambassador and Ohanian discussed MOD intentions to contribute forces to security operations in Afghanistan after the return of Armenian forces from Iraq. Ohanian confirmed Armenia's interest in contributing in Afghanistan, and said he would welcome US help in determining the best fit for Armenian capabilities. The Minister expressed appreciation for U.S. military cooperation with Armenia and for U.S. assistance to Armenia's defense reform process. He also laid out his defense reform priorities, which include legislative reform, military education, increased civil control of defense structures, and senior-level officer training opportunities. Another priority area for cooperation is completion of the Strategic Defense Review process that Ohanian hopes will incorporate democratic procedures used in similar reform processes in central and east European countries. END SUMMARY.

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PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS  
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¶4. (C) During her introductory call on Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian, the Ambassador expressed appreciation for Armenian contributions to peacekeeping and security operations in Kosovo and Iraq. Ohanian mentioned that Armenia doubled the size of its Kosovo contingent in June 2008 to demonstrate its capabilities to conduct peacekeeping operations, and its interoperability and readiness to work with NATO forces. He expressed understanding that Armenia's participation in the mission in Iraq was coming to an end, but said peacekeeping forces will prepare to participate in other tasks after their return home. Armenia wants to continue to show that it is an international security contributor, and not just a security consumer.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador noted that there have been unofficial discussions about Armenia's desire to participate in security operations in Afghanistan/ISAF. The Minister confirmed this, adding that in the past Armenia had offered military medical personnel and interpreters, but is looking at other capabilities it could contribute as well. The Ambassador said that if Armenia was ready to make a contribution, she would support that objective in Washington or at NATO. Ohanian said it would be helpful to have some suggestions or recommendations from the US on potential areas where Armenia could make a contribution. He could then take this information to Armenia's political leadership for

consideration. The Ambassador said this issue is being worked in Washington and that both sides can work together and share thoughts. Ohanian agreed that it would be helpful to organize some discussions on Armenian capabilities and force generation for such operations.

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REFORM PRIORITIES  
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¶4. (C) The Minister reiterated that the present military leadership continues to support the basic directions and traditions of military reform established by Ohanian's predecessor. Ohanian stated that his challenge as leader of the defense establishment is to conduct in-depth reforms while at the same time maintaining combat preparedness and the ability to provide for the defense of the country. He said that the defense reform program has gone well overall, in spite of some small obstacles that have had to be overcome.

¶5. (C) Ohanian stated his priorities for defense reform, which include improving combat readiness, legislative reform (where he said the reform objectives for 2008 have mostly been completed), revising and updating the professional military education system and expanding senior-level officer training, the continued development of a professional Non-Commissioned Officer corps, increasing public awareness of the activities and developments in the military, strengthening civil control of the defense structure, and the expansion and improvement of the Armenian peacekeeping forces. Other important areas include cooperation through various US assistance programs such as Foreign Military

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Funding (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), and the State Partnership Program (SPP)/ Joint Contact Team Program (JCTP). Ohanian also mentioned that the construction of a new training site/garrison for the Armenian Peacekeeping Brigade is a priority effort.

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DEFENSE REFORM  
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¶6. (C) Ohanian said that a priority area of cooperation with the United States and the West is the Strategic Defense Review (SDR), an important process that will support defense reforms and help Armenia meet its Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) objectives with NATO. The SDR will help Armenia's military to identify long-term objectives for defense transformation by drawing upon models that have been used in central and eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria. Ohanian mentioned the recent creation of a new inter-agency commission for the SDR's implementation that President Sargsian decreed. This commission is co-chaired by the Minister of Defense and the Chairman of the National Security Council, Artur Baghdassarian.

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PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION/TRAINING  
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¶7. (C) The Ambassador agreed with Ohanian that professional military education for senior officers is a very worthwhile area of assistance, and complimented Armenia for its utilization of IMET-trained officers within their fields of trained specialization. This encourages the US and other partner countries to provide additional training opportunities. The Ambassador encouraged the Ministry of Defense to consider sending even more participants to such training programs if possible. The Ambassador also mentioned having heard that the Minister was very interested in observing US unit training programs. She said there was ongoing planning to support this desire by organizing a visit to US training facilities in Germany. Ohanian expressed appreciation for Armenia's IMET opportunities and the

support for his possible trip to Germany.

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BENS VISIT TO ARMENIA  
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¶8. (C) The Ambassador commented about the late October visit of the Business Executives for National Security (BENS) delegation to Armenia, noting her view that it is very important for senior business leaders to have a good understanding of international security issues. USEUCOM had made this visit a high priority, and the Embassy regards the visit as an opportunity for delegation members to obtain a better understanding of the security situation in Armenia and the region. The Ambassador expressed hope that the delegation would have an opportunity to meet with Ohanian and other senior government leaders. Ohanian agreed that he would like to meet with the delegation.

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NATO EXERCISE COOPERATIVE LONGBOW/LANCER  
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¶9. (C) The Ambassador noted that the ongoing NATO exercise (COOPERATIVE LONGBOW/LANCER) that Armenia is hosting provides a great opportunity to demonstrate Armenia's abilities, and is important in deepening military cooperation and mutual understanding.  
YOVANOVITCH